

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1948

Volume IX, Number 12

Rachel W. Coffin, Editor

Week of May 10, 1948

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"Sally"
"Hold It!"

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"Sally"

DAILY NEWS

MAY 7, 1948

Willie Can't Help 'Sally' Enough

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Distance has not lent enchantment to Jerome Kern's "Sally." The space of nearly 27 years in time and three blocks in the city has done regrettable damage to a once-delightful musical. Not even Willie Howard, who is indestructibly and immortally funny, could keep last evening's presentation at the Martin Beck from being rather dull.

Ziegfeld presented "Sally" at the New Amsterdam, on 42d St., late in 1921, and a dream of a girl named Marilyn Miller danced into our hearts and sang us a song of hope about a silver lining. Last evening Hunt Stromberg Jr. and William Berner presented "Sally" again at the Beck, on 45th St., and the difference was considerable.

In the title role of the new version—which has been modernized with a topical gag here and there—is Bambi Linn, the child who danced so well in "Carousel" that David O. Selznick took out a patent on her. Miss Linn cannot sing very well, and wisely refrains from much of it. She doesn't dance

very much, either. Nobody dances very much.

Nobody Sings the Songs.

Nor does anybody sing very much. The Kern melodies, like "Tulip Time in Sing Sing," "Look for the Silver Lining," "Wild Rose" and "Dear Little Girl," remain fresh because they have enduring simplicity—but last evening there wasn't anybody in the cast who could sell any of them.

Mr. Howard, playing the role of a nobleman forced by ill circumstance to become a Greenwich Vil-

lage waiter (a part created by Leon Errol), is constrained to step out of character and become himself. He gives Miss Linn a lesson on how to win audiences and elicit applause by doing, for her benefit, his old routine of imitating George Jessel, Maurice Chevalier, Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor.

Let's Reverse It.

Mr. Howard still is a great man of the stage, and it is time he stopped handing out his poses to lesser characters. A really good act to fill in a dead spot in a show would be for Cantor, Jolson, Chevalier and Jessel—all hasbeens so far as the musical comedy stage and my own affection are concerned—to come out in turn and do their own imitations of Willie Howard.

The physical production of "Sally" is all right, with settings by Stewart Chaney. David Mordecai's orchestra labors dutifully at the Kern score, and such players as Jack Goode, Kay Buckley, Bibi

"SALLY"

Musical comedy with book by Guy Bolton; music by Jerome Kern; lyrics by P. G. Wodehouse and Clifford Grey; staged by Billy Gilbert; musical supervision by Fambrooke Davenport; dances and musical numbers by Richard Barston; settings by Stewart Chaney; orchestration, Robert Russell Bennett; costumes by Henry Mullie; production associates, Davis Lowe and Sue Davidson; orchestra conducted by David Mordecai; presented by Hunt Stromberg Jr. and William Berner at the Martin Beck Theater Thursday evening, May 6, 1948. The cast:

Nadina	Gloria Sullivan
The Young Waiter	Charles Wood
The Old Waiter	Hodge Hroven
Otis Hooper	Jack Goode
Rosie	Kay Buckley
Lily Bedlington	Bibi Osterwald
Shendorf	Henry Calvin
Mickey Sinclair	Robert Shackleton
Sally	Bambi Linn
The Grand Duke Constantine	Willie Howard
Mrs. Vischer Van Alstyne	Kathryn Cameron
Two	Lory Hilary
Olga	Andrea Mann

Osterwald and Henry Calvin give moderate support to Bambi and Willie.

If I weren't such a confoundedly old poop, and if I hadn't seen Miss Miller at the New Amsterdam in 1921, I might have had a better time last evening. But I doubt it.

Journal American

MAY 7, 1948

Howard at His Best In Nostalgic Revival

By ROBERT GARLAND

As a theatre reporter, I suffer from nostalgia. An occupational disease, it warps my better judgment. Consider the Hunt Stromberg-William Berner revival of "Sally." Last night, at the Martin Beck, where it had its official opening, I enjoyed myself tremendously. Surely, I asked me, it isn't this good, is it? But, in spite of such self-questioning, it was.

There, well west on 45th Street, I did long for Marilyn Miller. Once having savored the original dyed-in-the-Ziegfeld Sally, no lesser one will do. Not for a sufferer from nostalgia. But the Grand Duke Constantine of Willie Howard seemed grander and more ducal than Leon Errol's. So the reproduction at the Martin Beck

belongs in spirit to Marilyn Miller. And to Mr. Howard!

Not since Gleeber Goldfarb, cross-country taxi-driver in "Girl Crazy," has Willie Howard had a role so rightly up his alley. And now, as Connie, regal waiter in Shendorf's Greenwich Village Restaurant, he has learned to underplay. If he'll pardon the expression, there's a sweetness in his impersonation that makes it all the more memorable.

Truly, there's no business like show business. And what could be more show-businesslike than to begin your second fifty on-stage years with a personal triumph and ovation such as greeted Mr. Howard?

Until a negative number called "If the Shoe Fits" opened and shut like a door on Broadway,

the Cinderella story, retold to music, had never failed. "Sally" is the Cinderella story retold to music by Jerome Kern. Guy Bolton, in his libretto, and P. G. Wodehouse and Clifford Grey, in their lyrics, have done nothing to change it.

Now, as in 1920, our Sally-Cinderella is a good little poor girl dishwashing down in Shendorf's Restaurant. There, working as a waiter, is Grand Duke Constantine. On his evenings off, he mingles democratically with Long Island's top society. Nobody outside musical comedy could be as upper crusty as they.

Well, Sally-Cinderella gets to a ducal garden party, substituting for a missing ballerina, takes on a leading role in the current "Ziegfeld Follies," wins Mickey Sinclair, who has more snobbery than brains, and, as the final curtain falls, emerges from the Little Church Around the Corner singing out loud about her silver lining.

By this time, my nostalgia has me down. The nostalgia from which I suffer plus the Willie Howard I admire. Between them, I'm in no condition to write a safe and sane review.

Against soaring imaginative and constantly helpful backgrounds by

Stewart Chaney, Billy Gilbert has staged this "Sally" with skill. The orchestra, under David Mordecai, makes much of "Look for the Silver Lining," "Wild Rose," "The Church Around the Corner" and half a dozen other nostalgic numbers which may not have been in the piece originally.

In the title role, Bambi Linn's a big girl now. With hair up and voice down, she is, I suppose, as good as any non-Marilyn Miller Sally could be. But, if she'll pardon my nostalgia, Marilyn gets in my eyes each time Bambi comes on stage. Even when she's dancing as Marilyn never danced to the tune about the wild rose.

Jack Goode is Summer-operash as Otis Hooper. Kay Buckley is his cooperative girl-friend, Bibi Osterwald is herself once more as the Mrs. Bedlington who used to be Mrs. Ten Broeck. Robert Shackleton is a colorless upper cruster. The new orchestrations by Russell Bennett are helpful, as are the dances by Richard Barston.

With nostalgia, "Sally" is a great success with me. Without nostalgia, I imagine it's pretty much Willie Howard's show. Either way, I'm glad I didn't miss it last night at the Martin Beck.

"Sally"—continued

The Sun

MAY 7, 1948

'SALLY' REVIVED AT MARTIN BECK

"Sally" returned to New York last night, twenty-seven-and-a-half years, four blocks—and some distance in disenchantment—from its first performance here.

New York Post

MAY 7, 1948

Willie Howard and Others Help the 'Sally' Revival

By VERNON RICE

This cannot be a nostalgic review. Twenty-eight years have passed since the late Florenz Ziegfeld presented the Jerome Kern musical "Sally" with Marilyn Miller at the New Amsterdam. I never "knew it when."

"Sally" returned last night, ushered into the Martin Beck by Hunt Stromberg Jr. and William Berner. Though Ziegfeld and Kern have gone, they were represented. Kern by his everlasting score and Ziegfeld by the spirit

The old girl shows her age in spots, with the conspicuous exception of periods onstage by a man named Willie Howard, who doesn't show his. Rounding out half-a-century in the theater, he is a hypodermic to the proceedings, even when he enters to the line "Oh, your Highness, it's you" and must answer "Who'd you expect? Mrs. Nussbaum?"

In two acts and with a dozen musical numbers (the music is credited to the late Jerome Kern, but it's not his most memorable), the revival at the Martin Beck is a melange of streamlined nostalgia and dubious topicality. Strung on the Cinderella fable of

of some of the production. The dancing Miller has gone, too, and, alas, she was missed, especially in the big production numbers. Had she, or a new Marilyn Miller and a good over-all supervisor been around, this revival might very well have been a whopping success of the bring-back-the-old-days school of revivals.

As it is, there is the show's star, Willie Howard, the stout-hearted comedian, making his material seem much better than it is, and being wonderfully funny all the time. There are also the sentimentally stylized sets of Stewart Chaney, having the by-gone era seem more glamorous than it ever could have been; the costumes of Henry Muller, which suggest the period

a kitchen slavey who poses as an exotic foreign charmer to get her big chance dancing. It encompasses, on the one hand, such lovely old songs as "Look for the Silver Lining" and on the other quaint jests exploiting current high prices.

Bambi Linn, ballerina and one-time "Alice in Wonderland," seemed a somewhat peevish Sally (the part made famous by the late Marilyn Miller) but her dancing was well-received. Howard as the Grand Duke Contantine—originally played at the New Amsterdam by Leon Errol—was richly comic, even when his material was not. Of the other performers, Jack Goode

who resembles Gene Kelly, was energetic as a harum-scarum agent; Robert Shackleton ingratiating as Sally's swain, and Bibi Osterwald well able to take care of herself, notably in a number called "Cleopatra" and pronounced "Cleopatera."

Billy Gilbert, who did the staging, has been well-known as a sneezing comedian. Gesundheit.

The show's name may be Sally but its backbone—not to mention its funnybone—is Willie. If its run approaches the seventy weeks of the Ziegfeld original, at least one reviewer will be astonished.

JOSEPH MACKEY.

in the clothes with none of the horror that it was in the styles, and above all, the magnificent staging of the big dance and musical numbers of Richard Barstow, catching what must have been the Ziegfeld touch, but adding touches of his own.

And that Kern score! Lush, melodious and sentimental. "Look for the Silver Lining" and "The Wild Rose" have been kept alive through the years by the radio, but they are back now in the theatre where they belong, being done in the manner and style they should be. "The Church Around the Corner," "Dear Little Girl" and "Reaching for the Stars" are not being overlooked either. They are all given the proper attention by the orchestrations of Robert Russell

Bennett and by the musical supervision of Pembroke Davenport.

Guy Bolton, apparently, couldn't do much about the original book he and P. G. Wodehouse wrote in the first place and so it fills up time between musical and dance numbers while Billy Gilbert, the director, gets people on and off the stage.

Bambi Linn, though sweet and girlish, in trying to fill Marilyn Miller's dancing shoes, indicated that she is much more at home in an Agnes DeMille ballet.

There are Willie Howard, set and costume designers Chaney and Muller, dance director Richard Barstow, and not to be overlooked, Jerome Kern, however, providing high spots in an otherwise routine evening in the theatre.

Daily Mirror

MAY 7, 1948

'Sally' in Revival Is A Tuneful Hit

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The revival of "Sally," which Hunt Stromberg, Jr., and William Berner opened at the Martin Beck Theatre last evening, keeps pretty well to the period in which it was first produced. The costumes are those of the early prohibition days. The Jerome Kern score retains its pristine purity and tunefulness. But the book has been revamped for comedian Willie Howard and his associates in the cast.

"Sally," as you may recall, has to do with a little restaurant dishwasher who wins fame in the theatre and marries a socialite. She is helped on her way upward from rags to riches by a brash young theatrical agent and an exiled Duke, who divides his time between attending swanky parties and waiting on tables in a cafe.

The current production of "Sally" is going to have the old-timers arguing furiously with the

young fry. The old-timers are going to feel that the theatre may have quantities of performers today, but that they lack the qualities that existed in the memorable days of Ziegfeld.

They are going to think back to such outstanding performers as Leon Errol, Marilyn Miller, Irving Fischer, Jack Donahue and Walter Catlett. But they should take into consideration the fact that Stromberg and Berner, facing Hollywood competition, have

been lucky to assemble so good a cast as they have.

For the role of the Duke, created by Errol Stromberg and Berner have landed the immensely funny Willie Howard. Howard is of the old school. He could hold his own with the best of them then, and he has few peers among the comedy crop today.

Much of the material that Howard has popularized in vaudeville and nightclubs in recent years has been grafted on to the Guy Bolton libretto, and it's a big help to a script that was showing its age. And when the Howard material runs a little thin, he turns to impersonations of Jessel, Jolson, Chevalier and Cantor—with uproarious results.

Howard scored a great personal triumph last night. The first nighters howled through much of the evening at his superb hokum, and blistered their palms applauding him.

Assisting Howard with the comedy is Jack Goode, a breezy funster, who knows how to sell vintage corn. To Bambi Linn, who clicked in "Oklahoma," "Carousel" and "Alice in Wonderland," falls the title role. Miss

Linn is certainly no Marilyn Miller. She cannot sing, and is but a moderately good dancer. However, she is ingratiating, thank to shrewd staging by Billy Gilbert, her handicaps are cleverly masked.

Robert Shackleton scores as the young socialite who finally leads Sally to the altar. He has a nice voice and a pleasing personality. Kay Buckley and Bibi Osterwald also merit appreciative salutes.

The Stewart Chaney settings and the Henry Muller costumes are in good taste. The choreography by Richard Barstow recaptures the nostalgic period in which the musical is set.

Personally, we think Stromberg and Berner have done a wonderful job on the revival. Having

seen "Sally" performed elsewhere in recent seasons, we know just how much they have done to lift its face. And we should be thankful that they have brought Willie Howard back to Broadway. The big street never seems quite right without his presence.

We had a delightful evening at the Martin Beck and, judging by the laughter and applause of our first night neighbors, they did too.

The New York Times

MAY 7, 1948

**Willie Howard and Bambi Linn
in a Revival of 'Sally,' With
Music by Jerome Kern**

By BROOKS ATKINSON
Willie Howard is willing, but the show is weak. The show is "Sally," with a score by Jerome Kern and a book by Guy Bolton. In 1920 Marilyn Miller of the golden personality made it shine under Ziegfeld's pleasure dome, and Leon Errol of the collapsible legs made it look funny. Last evening it was revived at the Martin Beck with Bambi Linn in the Cinderella role

and Mr. Howard cressing and uncreasing his clown's map in the comic part. Although "Sally" sounds sweet, she has the old look now. Probably she should not be revived for another quarter of a century, when she will be in fashion again.

At the moment, she is certainly no good for Mr. Howard. He has never had less to do even during the years when he was not working. After a decent interval of old-fashioned musical comedy preliminaries, Willie with the round shoulders and the sorrowful face takes three strides forward into the plot and peers sadly at the audience. That is a moment that many of us have been joyfully anticipating for a long time.

But there is only one scene in which Willie reverts to top form. Wearing a ratty wig, a mousy

mustache and a shapeless dress suit, he sings a burlesque ballad that is just his stuff—"It's Tulip Time in Sing Sing." If you have seen Willie, a famous quartetist, pursuing his mouth to get perfect pear tones and rolling his eyes with the rapture of music, you know how funny this interlude can be. Willie is always best when he is mimicking art and culture—as an emotional singer, as a foreign-language teacher, as a rhapsodic lover of beauty. In the second act he imitates George Jessel, Eddie Cantor, Al Jolson and Maurice Chevalier, which are gestures in the right direction. But "Sally" has almost nothing for Willie and, accordingly, very little for us.

This is the musical show that, according to the conventions of the time, transmutes a dishwasher into a dazzling "Follies" dancer,

sweetening the evening with some illustrious Kern music. "Look For the Silver Lining" is the most remarkable, although "Looking All Over For You," "Wild Rose" and "Reaching For Stars" are notable, also. But Miss Linn is no singer and not as clean-cut a dancer as Marilyn Miller was. The cast includes Jack Goode and Kay Buckley, who make an affable team of singers and steppers, and Robert Shackleton, who sings the romantic songs with legal passion.

Since this is no hand-me-down revival, the production is colorful. But the book and the manners it evokes in the performance look counterfeit now. Instead of turning the pages of the book, Willie should have tossed it out of the window. He has always had jokes enough for a festive evening in the back of his head.

Herald Tribune

MAY 7, 1948

By HOWARD BARNES

Finds a Silver Lining

JEROME KERN'S "Sally," with sundry interpolations, has been given a sparkling revival at the Martin Beck. Although the musical was first done in 1920, the songs are as fresh and captivating as ever. The book is a bit on the long-winded side, but it serves to give Willie Howard a tramping field day. Between the star and the Kern melodies, "Sally" only creaks occasionally. For most of the time, what with Bambi Linn's graceful dancing, Jack Goode's antics, Robert Shackleton's fine

singing and a smart production, the offering has both nostalgic and immediate delight.

Old-timers will be a bit surprised to find large chunks of this "Sally" borrowed from another of the composer's works, "Leave It to Jane." They may argue that the original score did not need bolstering, but they cannot object to hearing such felicitous tunes as "The Siren Song," "Cleopatra" or "Leave It to Jane" itself combined with "Look For the Silver Lining" and "Wild Rose." Here is a score of amplitude and variety as well as rich musical content. It keeps the somewhat revised Guy Bolton book moving along merrily. Howard takes over in masterly fashion when the proceedings start to drag. As surely as Marilyn

Miller dominated for first "Sally," he holds the current revival to a key of pleasant clowning.

Miss Linn does not fail to meet the exigencies of her assignment. Her gamine beauty and her deft twirling around the stage are in perfect keeping with a conventional musical comedy plot. If her voice is somewhat lacking, Shackleton is constantly on hand to put over the lyrics. Together they make a personable and talented team. Meanwhile the actress and Howard conspire in some lively nonsense as a dishwasher and waiter in a Greenwich Village restaurant, who find more than a lining of silver. Even when the latter steps out of part to caricature the singing of such rivals as Jolson, Cantor or Chevalier, he contributes pace and

humor to what might have been a badly dated concoction.

The revival owes much to the Stewart Chaney settings. They recreate the atmosphere of yesterday in the theater without overdoing the period. Billy Gilbert's staging is not always incisive, but he has done well with the "Wild Rose" climax to the first act and he has reproduced a "Follies" number handsomely. Goode, as the agent who puts over the dishwasher, handles good and bad lines with dexterity and has an amusing bit of pantomime as he describes how he is going to drink himself to death. Bibi Osterwald and Kay Buckley are others who aid no end in sustaining the gaiety. "Sally" was wonderful some thirty years ago. It still has a lot of enchantment at the Martin Beck.

New York World-Telegram

MAY 7, 1948

'Sally' Not in Our Alley Any More

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Sally" is a show that was written in a period when musicals were designed to be done with great glamour. They were produced opulently, filled with sensational looking show girls, and starred extraordinarily versatile personalities like Marilyn Miller and Mary Eaton.

When you revive one of those shows with none of that glamour, it is pretty thin entertainment, and the current revival of "Sally"

makes a transparent evening.

A vivid outside curtain gives early promise of color and excitement that is never borne out in performance. The great saving grace of the evening is Willie Howard, who can be just as funny doing nothing as when he has the best material in the world.

Outside of his scenes, little in the show lives up to the wonder

its name recalls. The show is set in 1921, and the manner of the period is followed with no modern comment, which leaves the proceedings in a state of odd suspension.

"Sally" is the story of a dish washing orphan who impersonates a French star, is unmasked, then inexplicably gets into the "Follies" in time for an excerpt from that revue to be staged.

Bambi Linn plays the title role, and she is surely cute looking enough and an accomplished enough dancer to deserve better treatment. She has a tiny singing voice but seldom makes any show of doing a song alone.

There are two big dancing numbers staged for her, but neither shows her talents to any particular advantage.

Toward the end of the first act she has a routine with 16 chorus men in evening clothes, a setup that was used with devastating appeal for Marilyn Miller. In this case the choreography is dull and the men do not give Miss Linn any confident support.

Jack Goode and Kay Buckley are a competent comedy team for

songs and dances, but no great effort has been made to keep their material from sounding corny and aged.

Bibi Osterwald gives vigor and humor to her number "Cleopatra" which was lifted from the score of "Leave It to Jane" for this production, as was "The Siren Song." There are also snatches from the score of "Oh, Lady, Lady" turning up every once in a while.

Robert Shackleton sings pleasantly as the wealthy suitor of Sally.

Most welcome are other old familiar tunes like "Look for the Silver Lining," "Looking All Over for You" and "Wild Rose."

All in all this version of "Sally" is a lackadaisical entertainment. It has neither imagination nor punch.

Miss Linn is far too good a dancer not to lend a certain amount of fascination to her numbers, but they are not much help to her. When it is all over, it is Willie Howard who makes the deep impression, and he might as well be anywhere doing any show and would still be just as amusing.

"Hold It!"

Daily Mirror

MAY 6, 1948

'Hold It!' Can't Hold Its Audience

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Sammy Lambert made his debut as a Broadway producer last evening with a musical comedy called, "Hold It!" Sammy is one of the nicest guys on the big street, and we sincerely wish we could tell you this morning that he has a smash hit on his hands. But we cannot.

Broadway has been needing a rip-roaring musical about college life for several seasons, and we had hoped that "Hold It!" would fill the bill. But it lacks most of the things that made "Good News," for instance, such a delight.

Matt Brooks and Art Arthur have penned a book that plays like a synopsis with music cues. They started with a promising plot, but failed to develop enough robust situations on which to hang effective laugh lines.

The score by Gerald Marks and Sam Lerner is, we suspect, much better than it sounds. The numbers have been arranged at too uniform a tempo. The ballads sound like the hot songs. We

think that when some of the nightclub and radio maestros get around to such numbers as "Fundamental Character," "Hold It!," "So Nice Having You," "You Took Possession of Me," and "Always You" they're going to sound a lot better than they do at the National Theatre.

"Hold It!" has to do with the efforts of the campus leaders at Lincoln University to raise funds to buy trailers for roomless ex-G.I. students. They collect \$3,000, lose it, and then force the lad who played a beautiful girl in the Varsity Show to enter a Hollywood talent contest carrying a \$5,000 prize.

So, boy loses girl, but gets her back by the final curtain. And

she gets the screen contract that he failed to land. And Lincoln University gets its trailers.

Lambert has assembled a cast of ebullient young people for his leads, but failed to sign a solid star with the experience and authority necessary to tonic an ailing book.

Johnny Downs is likable as the Varsity Show star. Jet McDonald, who plays his girl friend, is easy on the eyes and has a pleasant though not a very strong voice. "Red" Buttons, in the chief comedy role, works enthusiastically in preventing lulls. Ada Lynne is a promising young comedienne, who hasn't quite decided whether she wants to be a Nancy Walker or a Violet Carson.

Other capables in the cast are Larry Douglas, Patricia Wymore, Kenny Buffett, Pat McVey, Douglas Chandler, John Kane, Paul Reed and Ruth Saville.

Douglas has, for our money, the best voice in the company, and does justice to the melodies that fall his way.

Michael Kidd, graduate of Ballet Theatre, has choreographed dances that provide the evening with most of its zip and zing. Kidd, known for his ballets, has this time introduced tap and acrobatic stepping to increase the show's pace.

Edward Gilbert has designed good settings, but we can't en-

'HOLD IT!'

Musical comedy with book by Matt Brooks and Art Arthur; music by Gerald Marks; lyrics by Sam Lerner; dances and musical numbers staged by Michael Kidd; directed by Robert E. Jevry; settings by Edward Gilbert; costumes by Julia Roe; orchestra conducted by Clay Warnick; orchestration by Hans Spialek and Ted Royal; vocal arrangements by Clay Warnick; ballet arrangements by Irma Jurist; presented by Sammy Lambert at the National Theatre Wednesday evening, May 5, 1948.

The cast:
 Liberators: Wana Allison, Gloria Benson, Janet Bewhel, Penny Carroll, Katharine Myrore and Helena Schurgott.
 Rodney Trent: Bob Shawley.
 Mrs. Simpkins: Ruth Saville.
 Mr. Simpkins: Douglas Rutherford.
 Mrs. Hlandish: Helen Wenzel.
 Mr. Hlandish: Budd Rogers.
 "Gargo": Denton.
 Larry Douglas.
 Bobby Manville: Johnny Downs.
 Helen (stage manager): Helen Wenzel.
 Jack: Jack Warner.
 Chuck: Bob Evans.
 "Judge": Rogers.
 Kenny Buffett.
 Sid: Sid Lawson.
 Jessica Bain: Jet McDonald.
 Pamela Scott: Patricia Wymore.
 Melba Henderson: Ada Lynne.
 Budd: Budd Rogers.
 Bernie: Bob Bernard.
 "Dinky": Bennett.
 "Red": Buttons.
 Paul: Paul Laylor.
 George Monopolis: Douglas Chandler.
 Penny: Penny Carroll.
 Mr. Jenkins: Paul Reed.
 Tom: Tom.
 Charlie Blake: Pat McVey.
 Headwaiter: Douglas Rutherford.
 Mrs. Jolly (house mother): Ruth Saville.
 O'Brien: Scott Landers.
 Martin: Martin Kraft.
 Reporters: Budd Rogers, Sid Lawson, and Helena Schurgott.
 Felix Dexter: John Kane.

thuse over Julia Sze's costumes.

"Hold It!" moves at an express-train speed. It is one of the fastest musicals ever to hit Broadway. But it carries too meager a cargo of laughs, originality and class for a click.

New York Post

MAY 6, 1948

An Unexciting Show Called 'Hold It!'

By RICHARD WATTS JR.

An aura of the commonplace hangs dimly over the new musical show called "Hold It!" At the National Theatre last night some amiable but, on the whole, not very exhilarating performers sang commonplace lyrics to unmemorable songs, acted frantically in some incredibly unfunny farcical situations and virtually knocked themselves out in their courageous but indifferent efforts to please. As is usually the case these days there was a good comic ballet, this time about the dreams of a movie-struck ingenue, but that is about all.

There is nothing to be indignant or annoyed about in "Hold It!" It does its best in its determination to be entertaining. By stretching a point I can even say that I found a couple of the songs, "Fundamental Character" and "Friendly Enemies," pleasantly tuneful. I enjoyed the energetic antics of a hustling and likeable comedian called Red Buttons, and the tap dancing of a good-looking girl named Patricia

Wymore is commendable. But that pall of the commonplace was always present, like the ghost of Banquo at Macbeth's feast.

Masquerade

Perhaps, in one way, I am not the fairest possible judge of the merits of the new musical comedy. Even in college shows it has never seemed to me that there was anything killingly funny in the sight of young actors dressed up as girls. And if the amateurs, for whom one is willing to make a few concessions in judgment, aren't bearable in it, professional thespians, up to the same sort of thing, are likely to be particularly loathsome. The plot of "Hold It!" is an effort to be hilarious about a similar masquerade. I prefer "Charley's Aunt."

According to the book provided by Matt Brooks and Art Arthur, Johnny Downs is a handsome and, of course, manly young collegian who acts the leading lady in the varsity show. As a lark, some of his pals enter a picture of Mr. Downs in gown and blond wig in a contest to find a new movie girl, and, as you have guessed already, he wins. To the authors this is a deliciously amusing situation, and they obviously have a good time expanding on it. I don't find

the situation amusing, and I didn't have a good time. It is a fairly fundamental difference of opinion.

Music and Lyrics

There is nothing especially wrong about either Gerald Marks' music or Sam Lerner's lyrics, save that, except in the possible case of the two numbers I have mentioned, they result in a singularly mediocre series of songs. "Hold It!" is the sort of show that you leave humming the hits of other musical comedies. Things are happier with the Michael Kidd ballet already referred to. It is bright and funny, even though there is in it a suggestion that it is not unlike a minor effort of Jerome Robbins.

It is hardly a violent criticism of Johnny Downs to say that if, in feminine guise, he won the first prize in a Hollywood beauty contest, the crop of girls with screen ambitions is pretty dubious this season. Jet McDonald is a satisfactory heroine, and Ada Lynne, the comedienne, is a hard-worker and no doubt good to her folks. The already mentioned Red Buttons is a capable performer, who would be worth seeing in happier surroundings. But there is little to be said on behalf of the show. It isn't even good-looking.

The New York Times

MAY 6, 1948

Freshman Cane Rush

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Quite a lot of young people are working quite hard to conceal a case of arrested musical comedy development at the National. The case is labeled "Hold It!," which was put on at high speed last evening and ought to be removed without any appreciable slackening of pace. Matt Brooks and Art Arthur, who acknowledge the authorship, are amused by the annual collegiate prank in which college boys take the parts of girls in college musical shows.

This has not really been funny to anyone above the freshman class for the last fifty or sixty years, and Mr. Brooks and Mr. Arthur have added to it nothing but noise, motion and boredom. As composer and bard, respectively, Gerald Marks and Sam Lerner have turned out a score that is equally overwhelming. Nor has Michael Kidd achieved a triumph of dance over matter; his ballets are wonderfully irrelevant.

To the young performers caught in this booby-trap, this department extends its condolences. May they never have worse luck.

New York World-Telegram

MAY 6, 1948

'Hold It' Holds It At a Swift Gallop

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It's a gay and gaudy evening down at the National where "Hold It" took over last night. A lot of fresh looking kids hang their eager hearts on their sleeves and give you their best. It is no mean gift.

This is musical comedy in the "Good News" tradition, about a lot of entirely pleasant bamboozing at a college. There are no big stars and no songs that worry your musical brain. It is not even particularly original, but it is filled with the best will in the world, painted in brilliant colors and it gallops along like a healthy colt in a maiden race.

"Hold It" is the "Charley's Aunt" of the collegiate GI house-

ing problem. The male "leading lady" of a college show loses the money his pals have pooled to set up a trailer camp. Some practical joker has sent his picture in wig and dress, to a movie beauty contest. When he is picked as the winner he is forced to go through with the deception for the sake of the prize money.

Gag and Blackout.

This is plenty of plot to keep things busy. The book writers have used a revue trick to good advantage, in the way they so frequently end a scene with a surprise gag on the blackout.

One of the most important contributions to the show is the costuming of Julia Sze, who plasters

the stage with uninhibited splashes of bright color that make the whole thing the air of a circus. Often this atmosphere is borne

out even further by Michael Kidd's dances, in which so frequently several lines of action take place simultaneously.

There is a wonderful number about college sports that makes you dizzy to keep up with it, and another of those popular moving picture ballets. The latter has its moments, particularly in the Arabian sequence, but it is uneven, and cannot compare with the silent movie rampage of "High Button Shoes."

The show has plenty of humor in it, and skims the surface of its sentiment with pleasant restraint. You might almost say that everybody loves everybody else, which makes for a most agreeable atmosphere.

A Wry and Brittle Style.

The best out and out performing of the evening is Red Buttons, who here comes into his own as he has not been able to in previous shows. He is something of a phenomenon, in that he is the youngest and maybe the last of those sure fire comedians developed by burlesque.

His style is wry and brittle, and he has developed his instinct for timing so his work is entirely clean cut. He has at hand a bottomless supply of gestures and ex-

pressions and even noises that can dress up comedy lines and make them punch.

As the beauty contest winner, Johnny Downs gets the fun out of his deception in the best of taste. He has verve and talent in the top tradition of musical comedy juveniles, dancing with accomplishment, able to hold his own with a tune, and playing with light hearted pleasure.

Jet McDonald is the brown eyed blond the boys fall for. She sings and comports herself with grace, but with a figure like hers it is a pity she should have to bother.

Ada Lynne can best be described as an embryonic Martha Raye. She has a good sense of comedy and proves in "Fundamental Character" that she knows very well what to do with a song. She can be batty and jazzy without being offensive.

Patricia Wymore sings an easy attractive song and is a menace to equilibrium in her tap numbers. When she and Kenny Burfett get their dancing shoes on together, they are just plain Hell on wheels.

Larry Douglas has the best voice in the show and plays ingratiatingly as what might be described as a sympathetic heavy.

"Hold It" is not the kind of show to make history, but it is certainly a good humored, vivacious prism.

Journal of the American

MAY 6, 1948

Gay Song and Dance In New Rah-Rah Show

By ROBERT GARLAND

For years there's been talk of setting "Charley's Aunt" to music. Well, nobody has made a song-and-dance show out of Brandon Thomas' comedy. Yet, before you wonder why I mention it, Matt Brooks and Art Arthur have taken a healthy hint from that good idea for the story of their "Hold It!" After a workout on the road, the result of their healthy hint-taking is at the National.

There, Fancourt Boberly of Oxford is Bobby Manville of Lincoln. And 1892 is 1948. The songs which have been added are by Sam Lerner and Gerald Marks. The dances which have been added are by Michael Kidd. Mr. Kidd, following the fashion, is a choreographer who never heard of Agnes de Mille. But, with the Jerome Robbins of "High Button Shoes" he is obviously familiar.

When I tell you that "Hold It!" is a George Abbott song-

and-dance show without George Abbott as director, you know what I mean. Not that Robert Perry hadn't put his hand to it with Abbotian determination to be youthful. He has! But when singing and dancing give way to plot and plotting, his young folks let that plot and plotting down. In the last big scene, especially.

But, after all the plot and plotting has been plotted, "Hold It!" is a song-and-dance show. And the singing and dancing are both good and zestful.

Show Within a Show

The "Charley's Aunt" derivative at the National gets going with a boys-will-be-girls college show the lads of Lincoln University are presenting. Called "Lovely Lady," or something of the kind, Bobby Manville is the leading lady. So good a girl is he that he fools almost everyone

but his fellow collegians on-stage and the onlookers in the audience at the National.

Once the show-within-a-show is over, Bobby and a couple of other fellows retire to the Tasty Toasty, a campus sweet-shop in which they're working their way through Lincoln. Then and there, it occurs to one of the couple of other fellows to enter Bobby's name and photograph in a nationwide contest for the most beautiful female student in America. Sure, Bobby wins!

As if this were not enough plot and plotting, Bobby and that couple of other fellows collect \$3,000 toward a housing fund for students. Trailers, that is, like in "Angel in the Wings." The \$3,000 disappears from Bobby's inside pocket. Come to think of it, I still don't know who took it...

But I know that, after much double-talk and innuendo, Bobby gets his Jessica—sorry, I forgot to tell you about Jessica—and the missing small fortune is made good.

It's a Likeable Cast

As Bobby Manville in men's clothing, Johnny Downs is young, likeable and danceful. As Bobby Manville in women's clothing, he is no Etienne Girardot—that's the original "Charley's Aunt"—or Jose Ferrer, who followed later. Red

Buttons, as Bobby's always trousered side-kick, is also young, likeable and danceful. He, too, can sing, following Bobby's "Always You" with a song called "Fundamental Character."

As Jessica I forgot to mention, Jet McDonald pretends to be a nicer girl than she was in "Begger's Holiday." She's best when singing "Buck in the Bank" with Bobby and "Down the Well" with Larry Douglas. Patricia Wymore is a Pamela to delight an ear or eye. As a matter of report, most of the on-stage youngsters are also likeable, danceful and remarkably young for their ages.

As director of the dances, Michael Kidd brings out the best in them. And even if his big ballet—which, he says, it isn't—does stem from Jerome Robbins' Mack Sennett number at the Shubert, which, in turn, stems from "Flickers" in Charles Weiman's repertoire, it's disarmingly un-Agnes-de-Mille-ian. As the writers of words and music, Sam Lerner and Gerald Marks are on the sunny side of Tin Pan Alley...

Nevertheless—or maybe because of all these things plus Edward Gilbert's scenic scenery—last night was relaxed and rah-rah-rah-ish at the National. When singing and dancing, which was most of the time, "Hold It!" held me happily.